



2026 U.S. Life Sciences

Employment Outlook

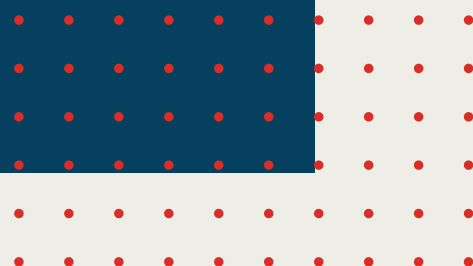


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Introduction

Given continued depression in biotech funding throughout 2025, concern about the economic environment has escalated compared to last year. More than half of respondents reported that they are very concerned about the economic climate. There was a marked increase in those who believe fundraising will get harder (39%, up from 29% last year). Those who were optimistic and believed fundraising would get easier dropped from 29% to 18%.

Do you anticipate a change in the fundraising environment in 2026?

39%

Yes, I think
fundraising will
get harder

43%

No, I think it
will stay the
same

18%

Yes, I think
fundraising will
get easier

Are you concerned about the economic climate?

53%

Yes, very
concerned

40%

Yes, somewhat
concerned

7%

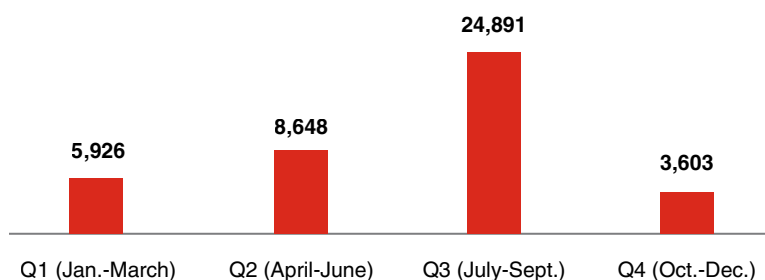
No, not
concerned

Sentiment analysis of BioSpace survey data indicates frustration and concern over a wide range of issues. When asked for open-ended thoughts or concerns about the biopharma industry in 2026, some common themes emerged:

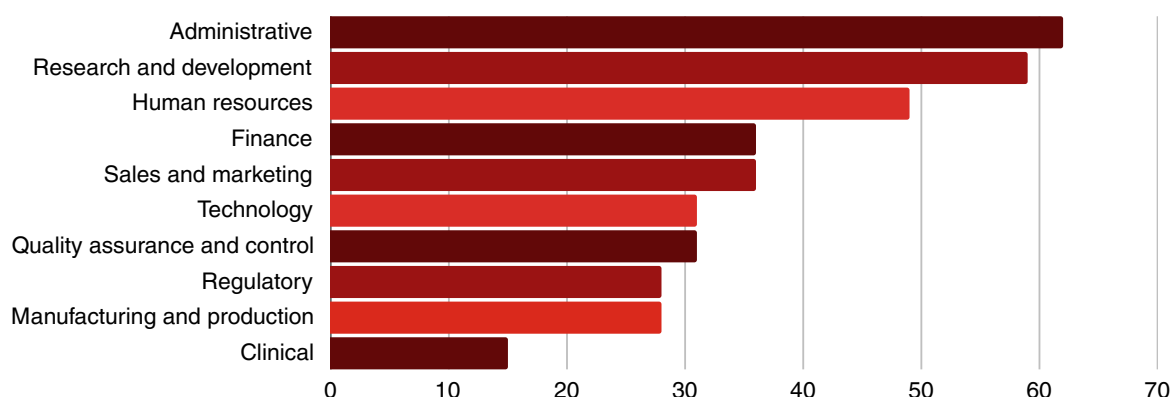
- Competition in the job market, with many facing layoffs, long-term unemployment and limited job opportunities
- Industry strength and funding constraints
- Government-funded research constraints and concerns about institutions closing
- Regulatory upheaval and instability
- Newly imposed administration policies
- Career stability and burnout
- The impact of artificial intelligence on career opportunities

Layoffs continued to significantly impact the workforce, affecting about 42,700 biopharma professionals, according to *BioSpace* tallies—an even higher number than the 29,000 impacted in 2024. Those cuts were at companies of all sizes, including Big Pharma businesses such as Bayer, Merck, CSL, Novo Nordisk and Novartis. 40% of the companies BioSpace surveyed reported making layoffs in 2025, across multiple departments.

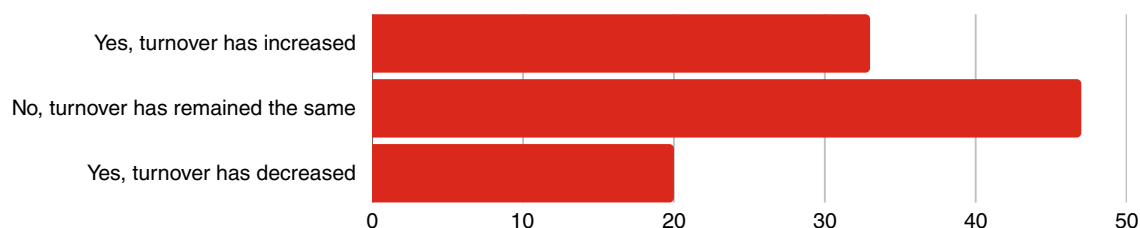
Biopharma Layoffs Made or Projected in 2025, by Quarter



Percentage of reported layoffs, by department



Has employee turnover changed compared to the previous year?



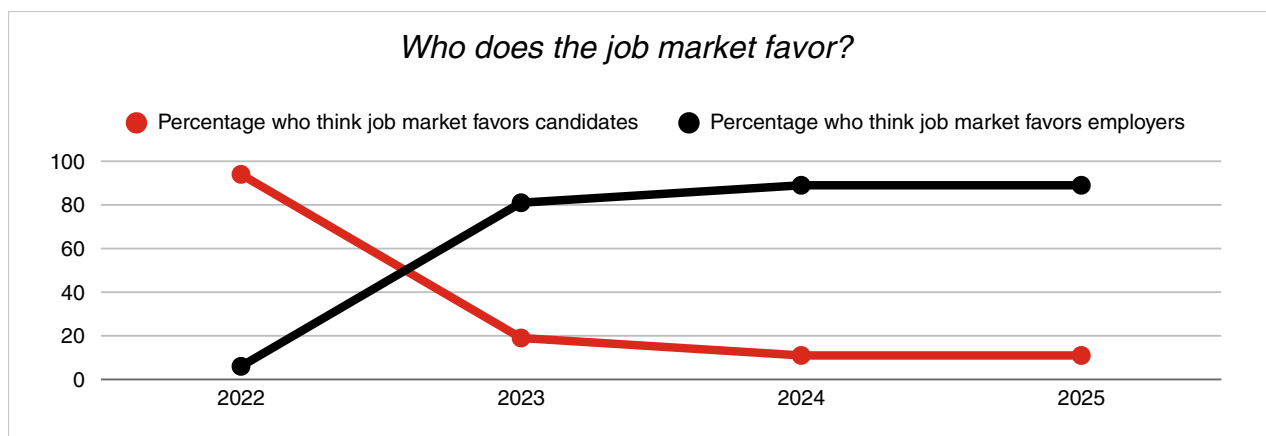
Average turnover was estimated by employer respondents as 8.7%; median turnover was 8%. 64% of organizations surveyed are actively recruiting, up from 59% last year, and 41% predict that their number of open roles in 2026 will increase.

There is hope things will improve in the year ahead. Sentiment around the J.P. Morgan Annual Healthcare conference in January indicated cautious optimism that the market would take a positive turn in 2026. However, similar sentiment was expressed in previous years, without the payoff the industry was hoping for.

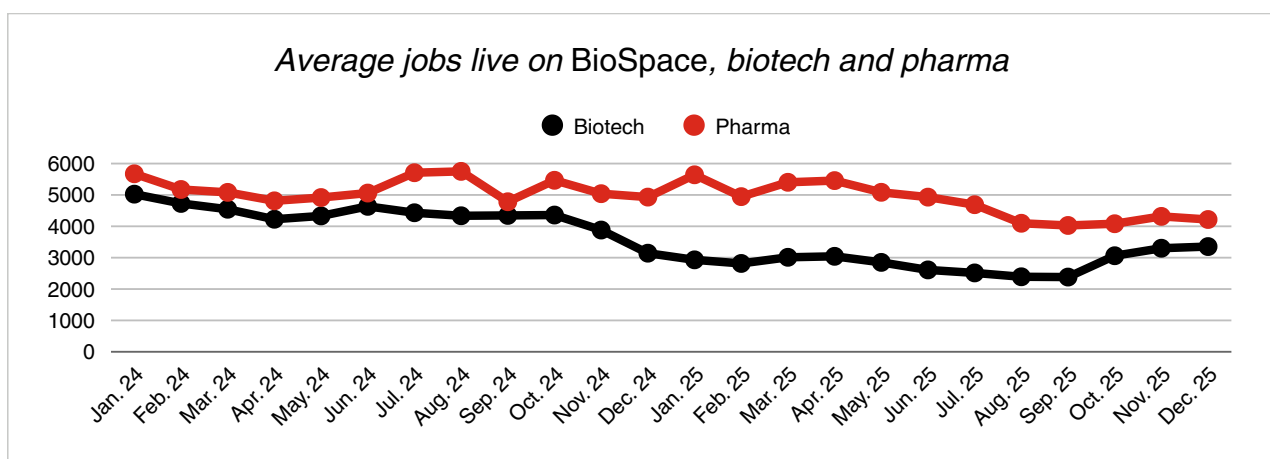
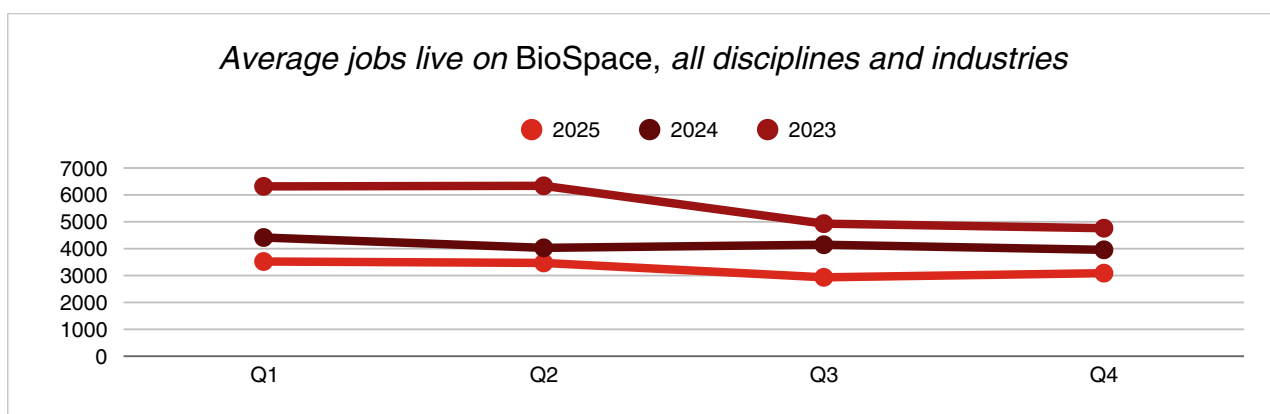
In this report, BioSpace explores current biopharma workforce sentiment, job activity trends and the prospective job and hiring outlook for 2026, particularly as it compares to last year.

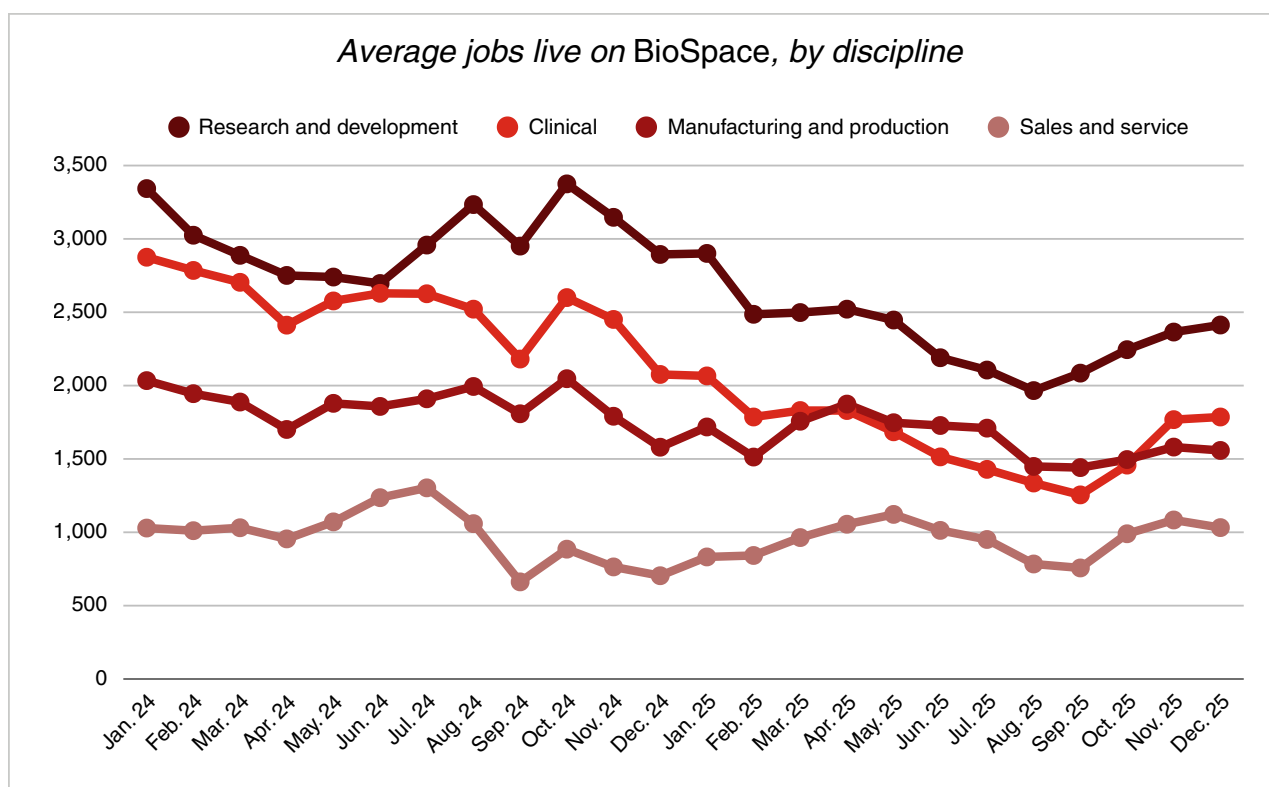
Job Trends

Open roles and hiring activity remain in decline compared to previous years. Compounded with layoffs, the job market continues to favor employers rather than candidates.

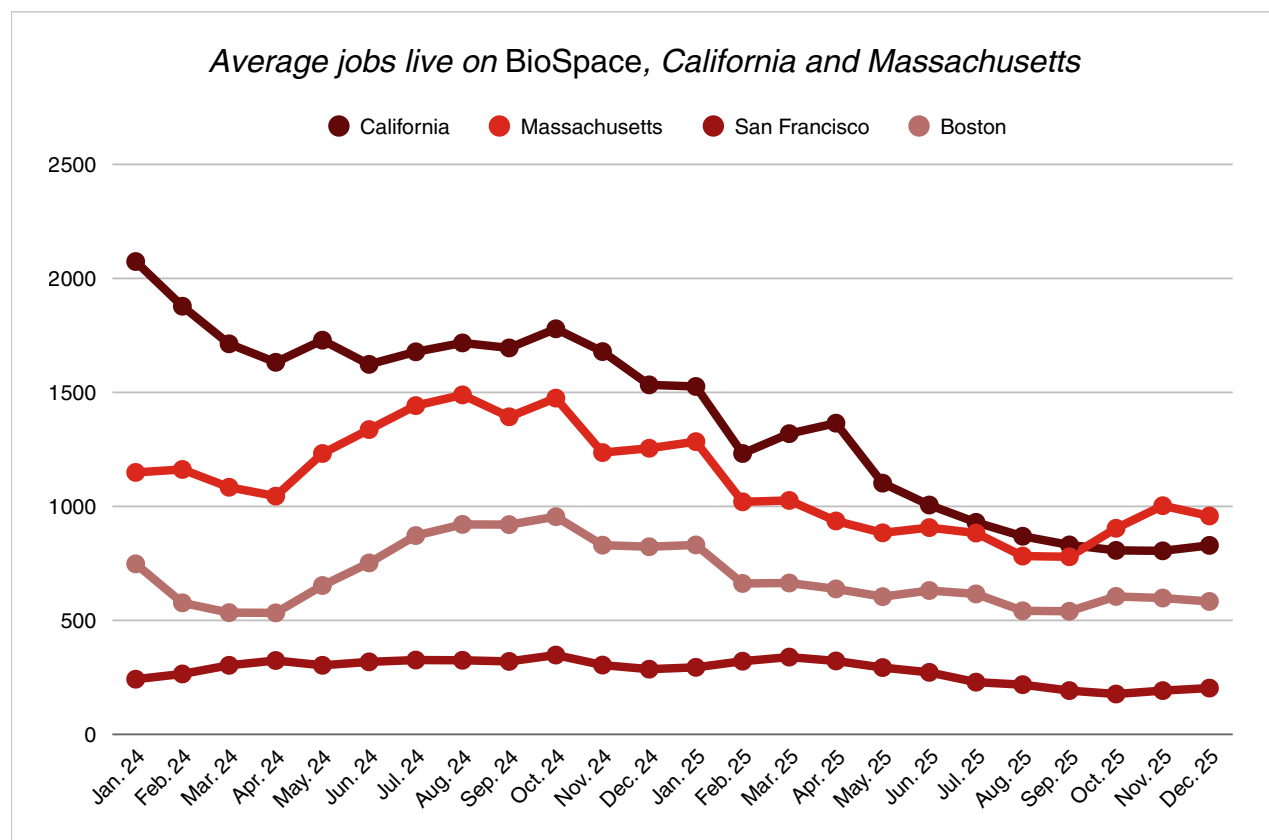


The data used in the graphs below are taken from *BioSpace.com* and are indicative of wider job market trends in biopharma. In conversations with biotech and pharma companies, *BioSpace* found most frequently that companies simply had fewer open roles, if they had open roles at all, and/or less budget for advertising and hiring for those roles. Comparing jobs live in 2025 to 2024, there were consistent declines: Q1: -20%, Q2: -14%, Q3: -29%, Q4: -22%. Bucking the typical job market cycle, Q4 saw an uptick in the number of jobs posted in Q4, perhaps signaling an increase in hiring for early 2026.





BioSpace examined job posting trends in two key biopharma hubs: California and Massachusetts. Comparing jobs live in California in 2025 to 2024, the decline was far more significant in the second half of the year: Q1: -28%, Q2: -30%, Q3: -48%, Q4: -51%. Similarly, in Massachusetts the decline exacerbated in the latter half of 2025: Q1: -2%, Q2: -25%, Q3: -48%, Q4: -28%.



Workforce Sentiment

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given challenges in the job market and funding environment, workforce sentiment slightly declined from 2024 to 2025. This could be due to mounting stressors on employees: The majority of respondent report performing tasks outside their duties and working more than regularly scheduled hours. Just under half (49%) think they are appropriately paid for the work that they do. 50% think they are underpaid. 62% think their job title accurately reflects their job level.

80%

Are proud of the company they work for
Decline from 82% in 2024; 87% in 2023

80%

Respect their company's CEO
Decline from 81% in 2024; 85% in 2023

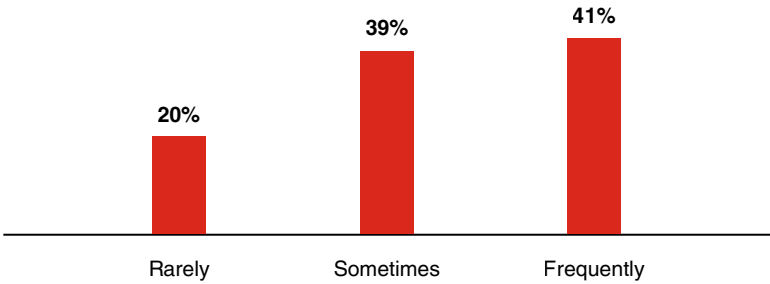
85%

Respect their manager
Increase from 82% in 2024

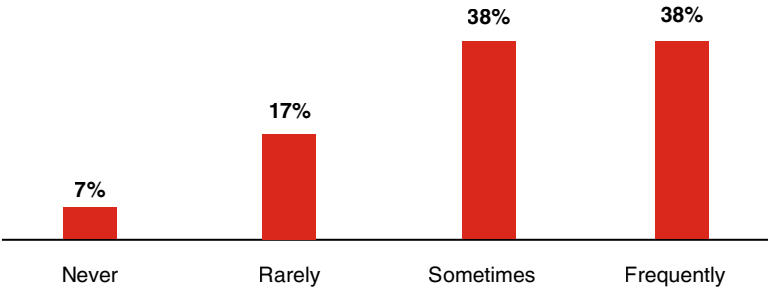
93%

Like their co-workers
No change from 2024

How often do you perform tasks that are outside your job duties?



How often do you work more than your regularly scheduled hours?



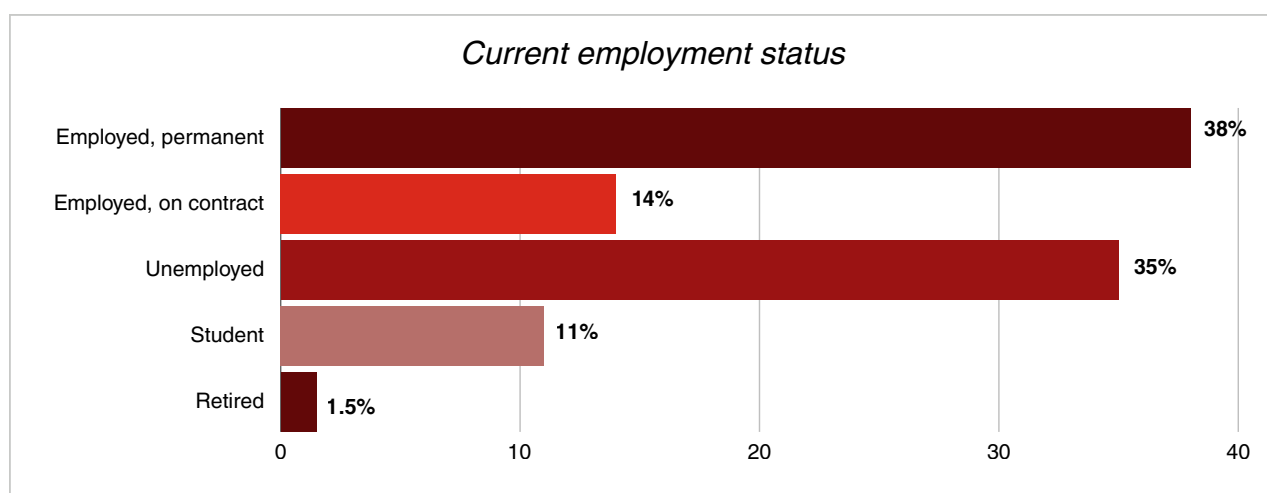
Job Search Plans

More employed respondents indicated that they would be looking for work in 2026 than in 2025; 64% will be actively looking for a new job compared to 59% last year.

The number of respondents indicating they are unemployed was even higher than in 2024, the highest since BioSpace started surveying life sciences professionals. 72% of unemployed respondents have been unemployed for more than three months.

A significant number of unemployed respondents are considering their options outside of the industry. The majority, 85% are considering roles outside of biopharma.

Additionally, 28% of unemployed respondents are considering roles outside of the U.S.



Top Reasons for Unemployment

38% Laid off due to general cost-saving measures

13% Laid off due to program getting cut

10% Resigned for personal or family reasons

8% Contract termed

5% Laid off due to company closure

5% Terminated

4% Laid off after merger/acquisition

3% Resigned to change industries

88%

of respondents will be
looking for a new job
in 2026

Duration of unemployment amongst unemployed respondents

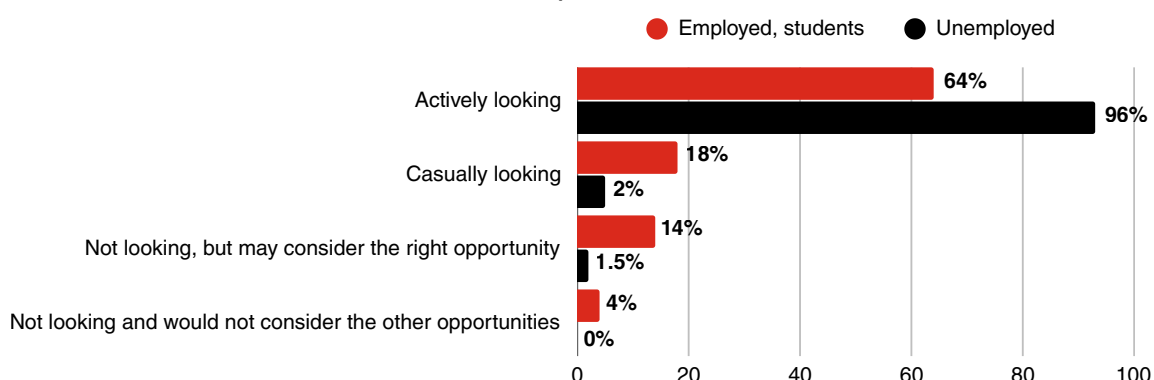
28%
< 3 months

23%
3-6 months

23%
6-12 months

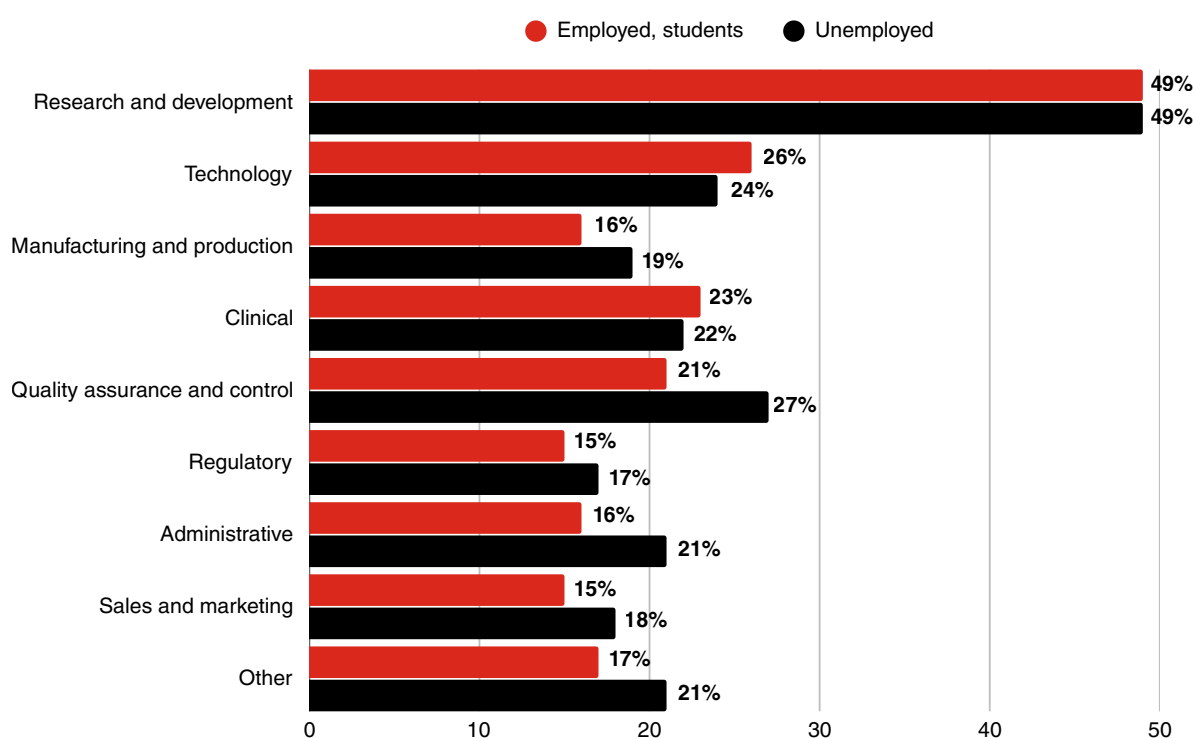
26%
> 12 months

Job search plans for 2026



More talent, both employed (26%) and unemployed (24%), will be seeking roles in technology (including artificial intelligence, machine learning) in 2026 than in 2025 (23% employed, 18% unemployed respectively). Among the unemployed, there was also a marked increase in talent seeking roles in manufacturing and production, quality assurance and control and regulatory, aligning with industry shifts in these areas.

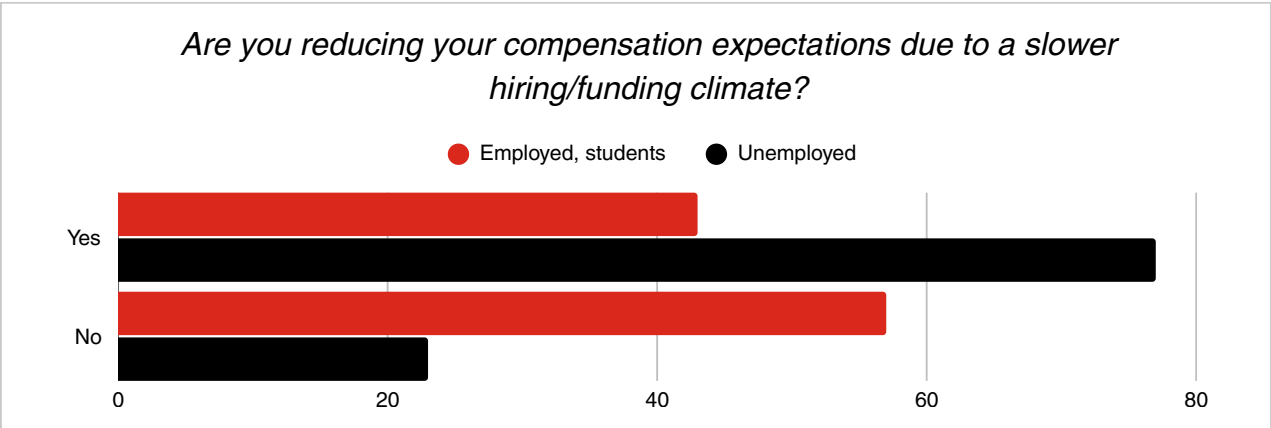
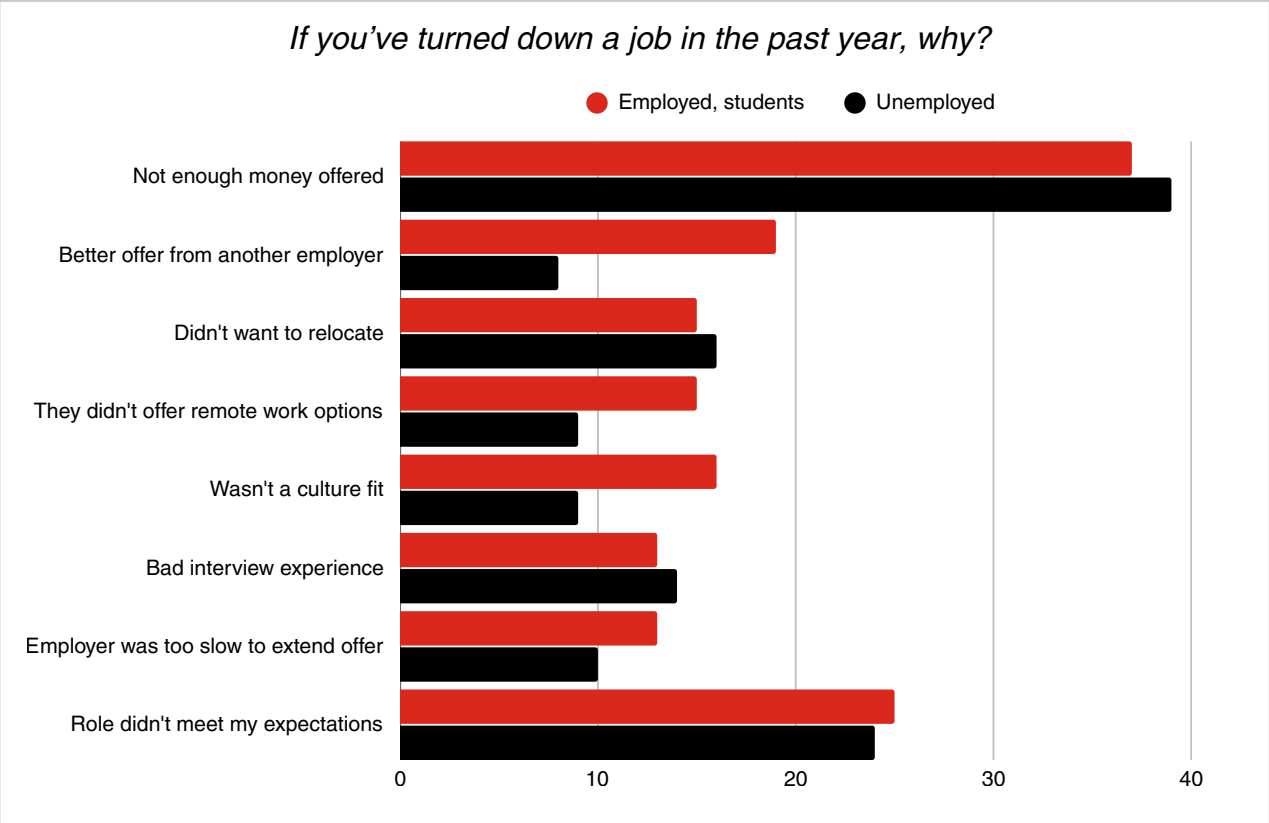
In what function will you be looking for your next role?



Despite the tight job market, respondents, both employed and unemployed, reported having turned down jobs in the past year. For the second year in a row, the No. 1 reason for turning down a role was not enough money offered.

However, more respondents are reducing their compensation expectations compared to last year, whether employed (43% in 2025, 36% in 2024) or unemployed (77% in 2025, 68% in 2024). This has led to stronger alignment between employers and candidates: 32% of surveyed employers reported their organization is struggling to meet compensation expectations, a drop from 43% lat year, and 28% think expectations are unrealistic, a drop from 38%

Of those that turned down jobs, almost a quarter did so because the role did not meet their expectations.

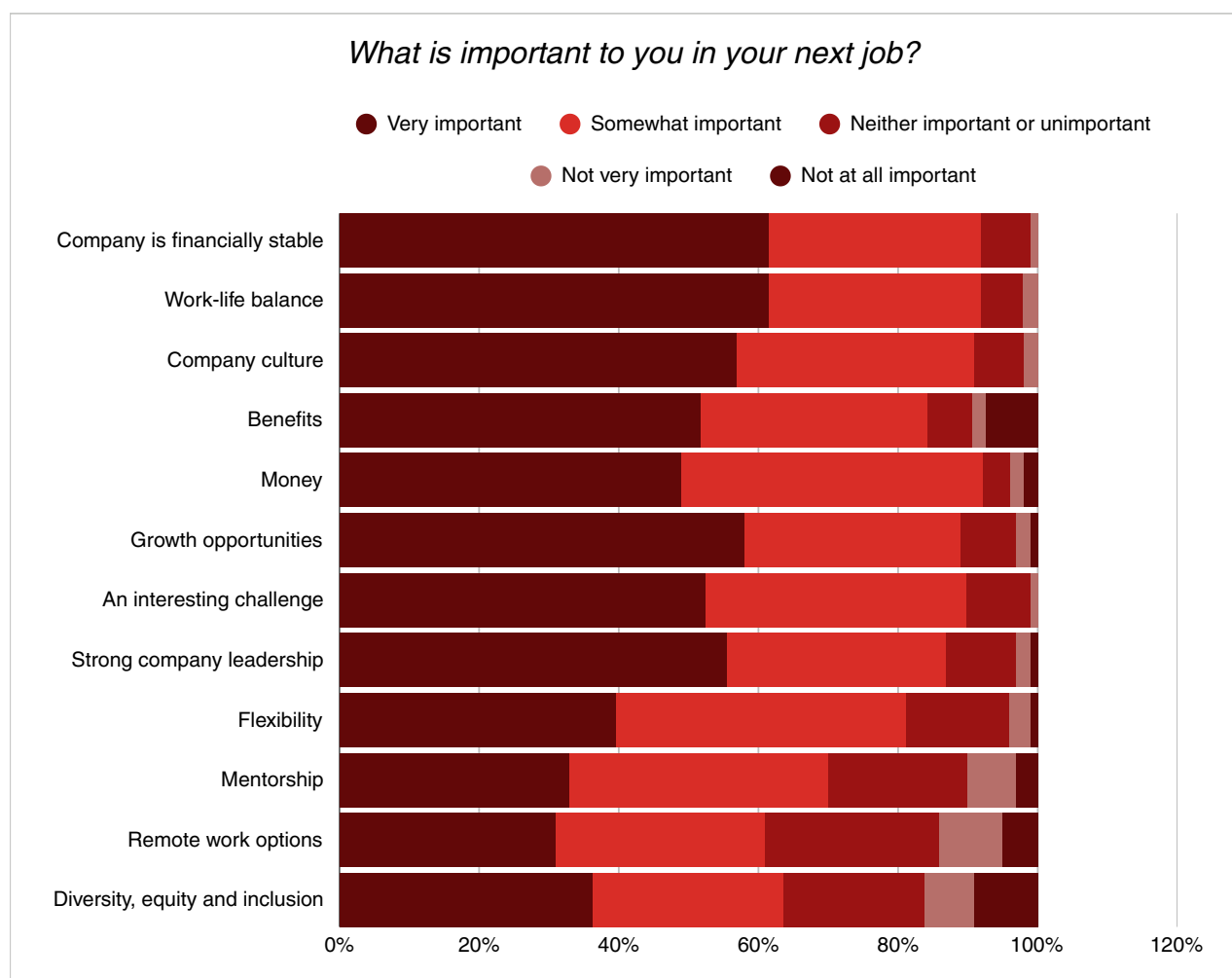


Motivations for Change

What is motivating biopharma professionals to find a new role in 2026? Unchanged from last year, the top reason life sciences professionals are seeking a new role is for more growth opportunities. Half of respondents do not think their company offers opportunities for advancement. When considering their next opportunity, the company's financial stability came out as the top priority, slightly edging out work-life balance; this was even more important to unemployed respondents.

Top Motivations to Look for a New Job

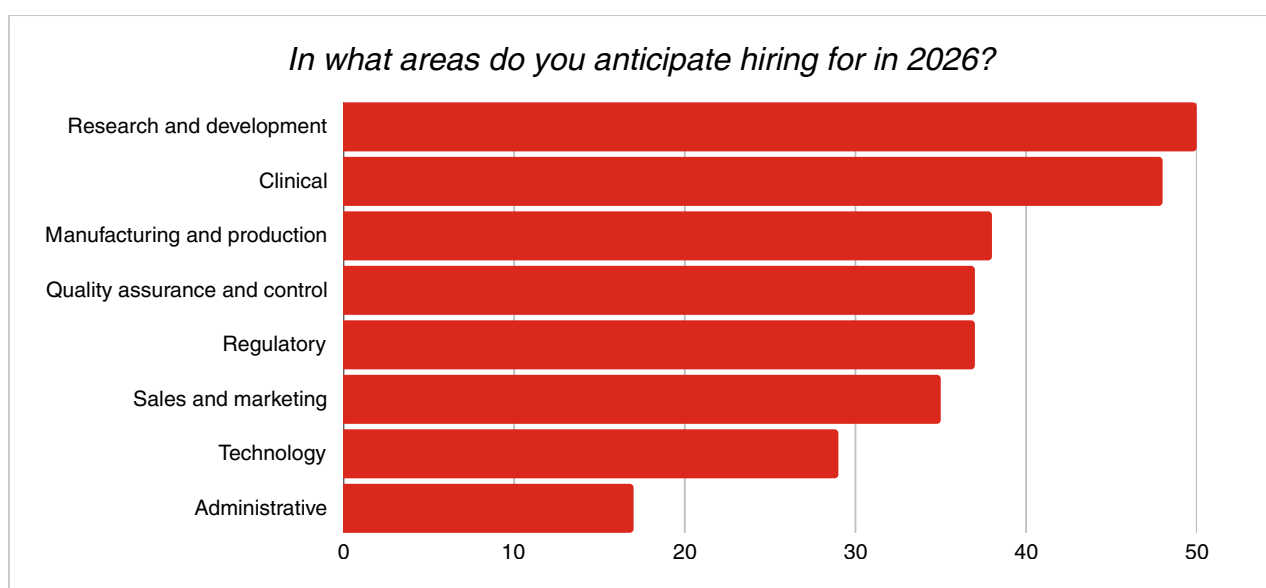
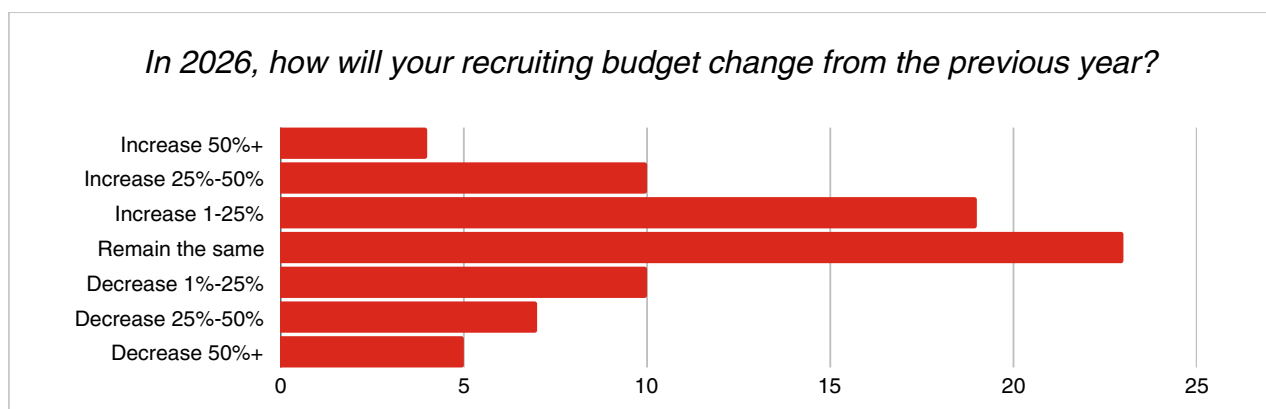
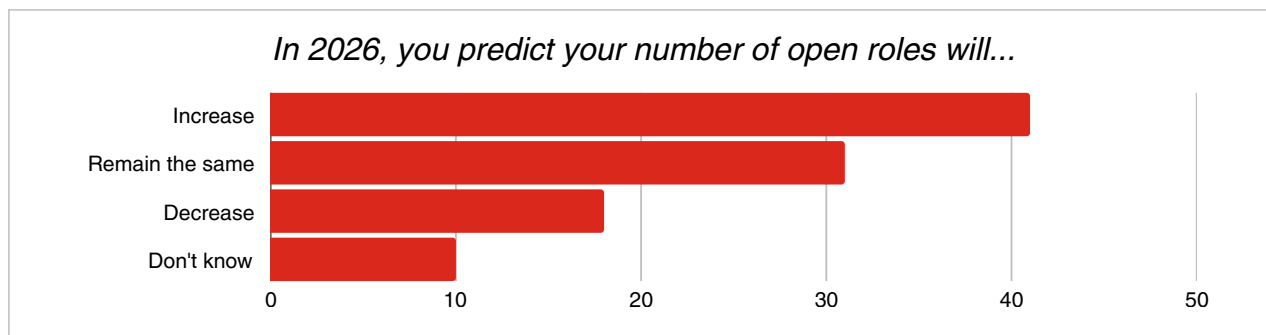
- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 67% want growth opportunities | 7 16% are unhappy with company culture |
| 2 53% want more money | 8 15% are unhappy with company leadership |
| 3 45% want a new challenge | 9 15% want more flexibility |
| 4 33% want better benefits | 10 11% want to relocate |
| 5 17% want a remote position | 11 9% believe their workload is too much |
| 6 17% are fearful they may lose their job | 12 9% are unhappy with their manager |



Hiring Outlook

64% of organizations surveyed are actively recruiting, an increase from both last year (59%) and the year before (63%). Additionally, 41% anticipate that their number of open roles will increase in 2026. However, 22% anticipate making layoffs in 2026, a slight increase from 2025 (20%).

29% believe talent recruitment will be easier next year, though more (40%) believe that it will remain the same.

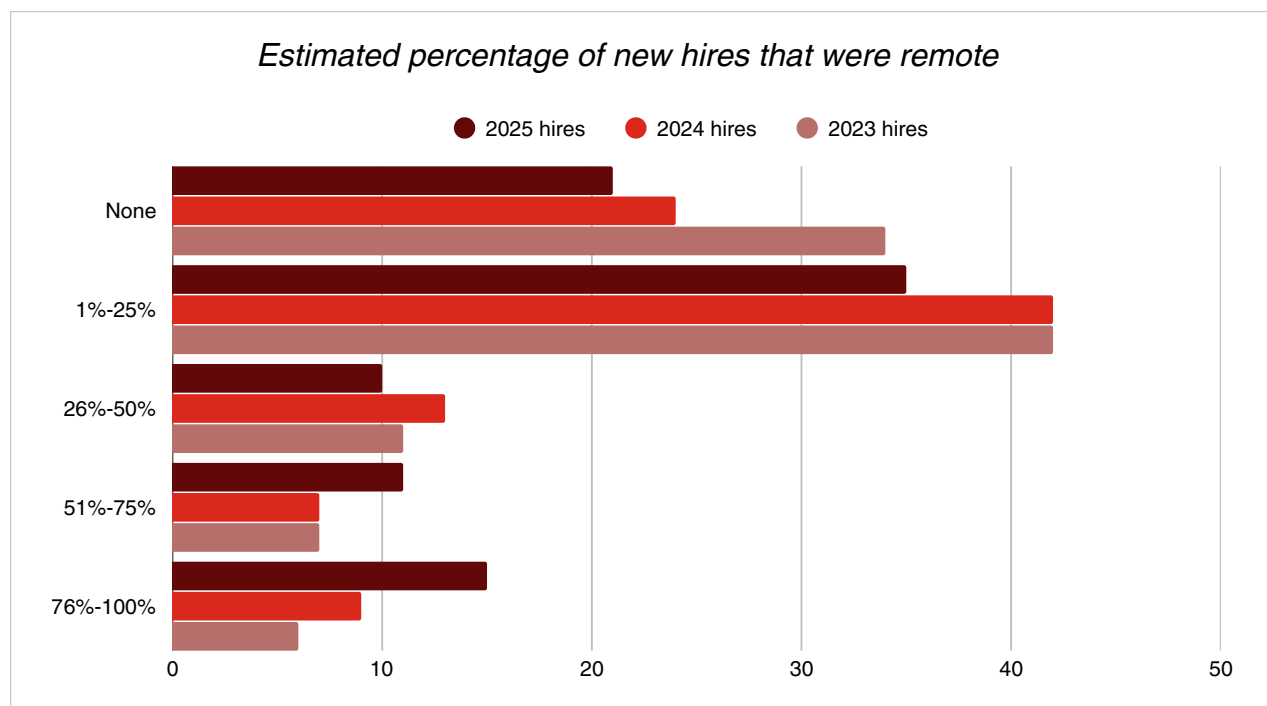
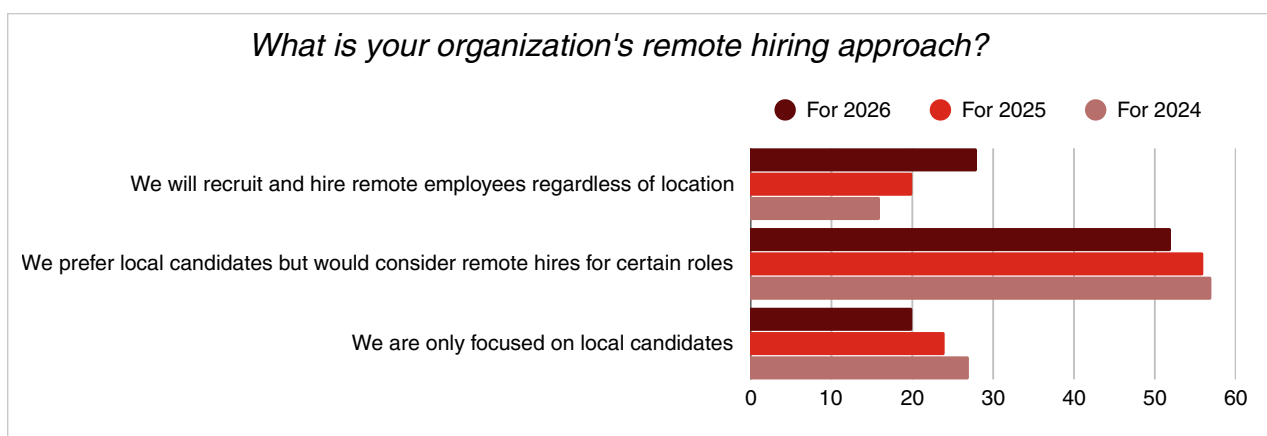


In terms of particular skills that are anticipated to be in demand, the most commonly cited were regulatory affairs; automation and machine learning and manufacturing operations.

Remote Hiring

More than half (56%) of companies indicated that they prefer hiring local candidates, though they would consider remote hires for certain roles. 20% are focused only on local candidates, though this is a decline from last year (25%). Even more companies in 2026 (28%) are open to recruiting and hiring remote employees regardless of location compared to 2024 and 2023, perhaps indicating that employers have struggled to hire local talent.

35% of organizations reported missing out on candidates due to relocation requirements.



What's Ahead

There were signals at the end of 2025 that indicated stabilization in the job market may come in 2026. Although jobs live on the *BioSpace* website dipped 14% year over year, they rose 10% quarter over quarter, the only quarter-over-quarter increase in 2025. There were also increases in two key disciplines from Q3 to Q4: science/research and development (14%) and clinical (23%).

Additionally, although made or projected biopharma layoffs jumped 47.1% year over year in 2025, from 29,017 to 42,701 people, the number of affected employees dropped year over year during the fourth quarter, from 6,814 to 3,603. Q4 also had the fewest people impacted of any quarter last year.

The average number of jobs live on *BioSpace* in the first half of January 2026 was 9% lower than the same period last year; however, this is a smaller year-on-year decline than has been seen in previous months.

Market indicators that are encouraging a renewed sense of cautious optimism include an uptick in venture capital fundraising; deal activity and IPOs.

Methodology

BioSpace conducted two web-based surveys, both fielded from Nov. 3 to Dec. 15, 2025. The first survey received 1,499 responses and was designed for professionals working in the biopharma industry in the United States. The second received 136 responses and was designed for those with insight into talent acquisition and/or workforce planning at biopharma organizations of any size that operate in the United States. Participation was promoted by email, social media and advertising to readers of *BioSpace* and visitors to *BioSpace.com*. Question formats included a mix of closed-ended, open-ended and contingency questions. An incentive was provided for one respondent to receive a \$100 Amazon gift card for each survey.

About *BioSpace*

BioSpace is the hub for life sciences news and jobs. We provide essential insights, opportunities and tools to connect innovative organizations and talented professionals who advance health and quality of life across the globe.

The proprietary resources we provide help companies make informed decisions regarding their workforce. *BioSpace* has a relationship with two-thirds of the entire U.S. life sciences workforce, with fast-growing subscriber lists and thousands of new site registrations every month. Our platform enables organizations to connect with our community through thought leadership, branding and recruitment marketing solutions—whether that’s through webinars, podcasts, email, articles, advertising or jobs.

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